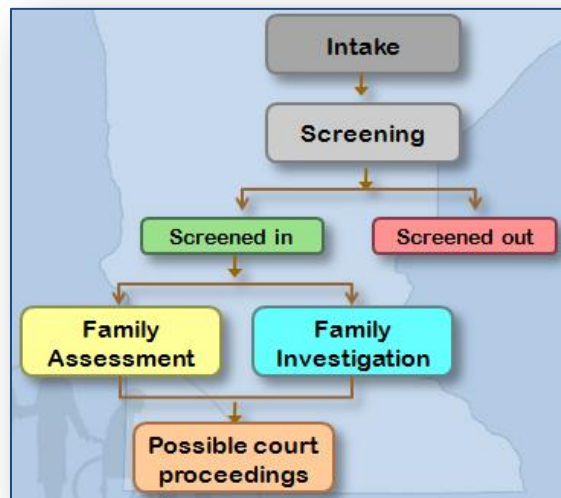


Module 7: Intake, Screening, Initial Assessment and Court

Module 7 consists of four chapters:

1. Intake and Screening
2. Family Assessment Response
3. Family Investigation
4. Juvenile Court Petitions and Proceedings.



This module introduces the basic knowledge and skills necessary to complete intake and screening tasks, the fundamentals of initial assessment, and potential child protection court responses.

Learning Objectives

When you have completed module 7, you will be able to:

- Identify key components of intake and screening
- Identify statutory and rule requirements, or minimum threshold, for screening reports in
- Determine when to use a Family Assessment
- Identify key components of the Family Assessment process
- Identify and use strengths-based engagement tools and strategies
- Determine when to use a Family Investigation
- Identify key components of the investigative process
- List legal standards required for maltreatment determinations, and civil and criminal court proceedings
- Identify and describe the major petitions and hearings encountered in child protection
- Identify roles and responsibilities of child welfare workers, law enforcement and the county or tribal attorney in child maltreatment cases.

Module 7 Chapter 1: Intake and Screening

This chapter introduces two separate but equally important processes – **intake** and **screening** for child maltreatment reports. Intake and screening often intersect and may occur simultaneously. You'll find that these two processes involve different duties and tasks, but require the same skill sets.

Intake is the *first* stage in the child welfare services process – it is the *first* contact the agency has with or regarding the family. It includes receiving the child maltreatment report and gathering relevant information. Use a family-centered, strengths-based approach to gather relevant information and provide support and encouragement to all people involved in the case.

Screening is the process of analyzing the information gathered during intake. Key components, such as whether the information meets statutory criteria for assessment, are analyzed. The screening process helps the agency determine the most appropriate response to the report.

Intake



This simplified diagram illustrates the basic steps of intake. From the Module 7 Attachments tab, print the CW – CP Intake Flowchart for an in-depth look at the intake process.

Initial Contact

The intake process starts with initial contact – the agency receives a child maltreatment report by phone, in person, or via other methods.

Your first task is to listen to the reporter, using active listening skills you learned in Module 5. Consider – is this a crisis situation? Does the reporter need calming?

Although most intakes are not emergencies, you must be prepared to respond when they occur. Reporters may have a different view on what they consider to be a crisis or emergency. Handling a crisis includes remaining calm, assessing for child safety and risk factors, and responding based on agency procedures.

Consult with your supervisor to learn your agency's protocol and procedures for handling emergencies during intake and screening.

Listen and Elicit Information

To successfully gather and record intake information and maintain safety for children, families, reporters and yourself, you must be able to:

- Communicate effectively
- Elicit detailed information

- Manage anxieties
- Use a non-threatening, supportive tone
- Make decisions
- Organize information.

General information to seek includes:

- Reporter's information – name, address, phone, professional or personal relationship to the child or family
- Name, age, gender, race, ethnicity, citizenship status of parents, caregivers, and child
- Permanent address and present location of child
- Is the child in immediate danger? If yes, how can the reporter help you assure safety?
- Description of when and where incident occurred; obtain a chronological account if more than one incident is reported
- Specific description of the allegations – what occurred.

From the Module 7 Attachments tab, print the Intake Questions Checklist. While this document is relatively comprehensive, always be willing to ask additional questions to obtain a complete picture of the reported concerns.

Reporters may not know the answers to all of your questions. That's okay; don't lead the person to assume information or create details that aren't true.

Ask Strengths-Based Questions

It is important to be thorough and strengths-based when gathering intake information. Focusing on strengths facilitates early identification of protective factors and gives a more complete picture of child safety concerns. Strengths-based approaches can help minimize potential confrontation, enhance cooperation, and reduce negative feelings.

Examples of strengths-based questions include:

- What do you believe is going well for the family?
- Do you know of any supportive relationships or resources currently utilized by the family?
- Do you know of any other supports or services that would be helpful to the family?

The Reporter

Throughout the intake, provide support and encouragement to the reporter:

- Explain the goal and process of child welfare and child protective services
- Acknowledge the importance of reporting
- Explain the rights of the reporter
- Address the reporter's questions honestly and respectfully
- Don't promise agency responses or outcomes
- Openly appreciate the reporter's effort to provide information.

Certain factors about the reporter may be helpful, including:

- Personal and professional relationships to alleged victims and offenders
- Custody disputes or pending legal actions

- Personal knowledge versus third-party sources
- Words or behaviors that cause concern regarding the reporter's intentions.

Your Responsibilities to the Reporter

You should direct the reporter to complete any legally required follow-up actions, such as sending a written report, based upon his or her status as a mandated or voluntary reporter.

Diligently attempt to collect the reporter's identification and contact information in case additional details are needed and to provide legally required notification of maltreatment report outcomes.

You may need to explain the limited circumstances in which a reporter's identity may be disclosed: 1) If mandated by court order, or 2) When child maltreatment information is maliciously reported.

Always respect a voluntary reporter's right to remain anonymous.

Intake Safety Concerns

Knowledge and awareness of potential safety concerns helps determine how quickly an intake needs to be screened. Consider these safety concerns as you elicit information:

- The alleged offender's current access to the child
- The level of harm alleged; existence of injuries; potential need for immediate medical attention
- Known medical, developmental, mental health, or chemical use issues for the child or family members
- A history of family violence; knowledge of weapons or firearms in the home; prior threats against public authority figures; criminal history
- Animals in the home
- Alleged condition of the home
- The manufacture or sale of illegal substances.

Information Gathering Outcomes

Intake involves gathering sufficient *factual* information to:

- Identify and locate the child, parents, and alleged offender
- Determine whether the report constitutes child maltreatment, or is a request for services or information
- Establish a timeframe for when the allegations occurred
- Determine if the report meets statutory criteria for assessment or investigation when maltreatment is alleged
- Assess the urgency or seriousness of the alleged maltreatment
- Understand the reporter's relationships, roles, actions and intentions.

Document

It is critical that you document in SSIS what the reporter actually witnessed and knows. Be clear – make sure facts, knowledge, inferences and assumptions are clearly and carefully documented.

Be sure to document all related incidents and timeframes. Use quotes as precisely as possible; make sure that speculation is clearly noted.

Record only facts; be sure the "facts" are representative of exactly what was said – altering even small grammatical expressions can change meaning. Descriptions are important and need to be detailed – but not reveal perception when they should reveal fact. For example, describing a caller as "angry" or "mad" is the opinion of the intake worker. Describing the caller as "shouting" and using quotes such as, "I'm really mad about this!" provides much more descriptive and accurate information.

Inadequate documentation can have serious implications for child safety and appropriate agency response. Documentation should always address child safety. Screening decisions should be based on solid and thorough descriptions.

The following examples demonstrate that information can be portrayed much differently depending on the questions asked and how the responses are documented. The intake worker may have asked all the same questions in the first example, but failed to document the responses.

Example 1

The reporter is calling about 8 year-old Billy Jones and his 2 year-old brother Willy Jones. Reporter saw bags of trash outside the entry of the home. Reporter noted that it smelled inside the home.

Reporter stated Billy's home was filthy and disgusting! Willy was wearing a dirty diaper. Willy wanted reporter to pick him up. Billy changed Willy's diaper.

Shortly after arriving at the home, Billy's mother, Rachael, came home. Reporter left after Rachael arrived.

Example 2

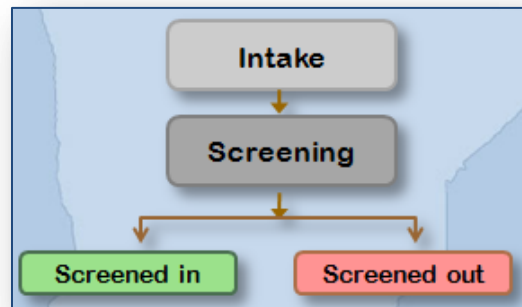
The reporter is calling about 8 year-old Billy Jones and his 2 year-old brother Willy Jones. Reporter dropped Billy off at his home yesterday evening around 5:30 PM. Billy and the reporter's son are friends. Billy was unable to enter his home initially – the door was locked. The reporter went up to the home to assist Billy. Billy told the reporter "There is a hidden key when my parents aren't home." Billy found the key and was able to enter the home.

Reporter saw bags of trash outside the entry of the home. The reporter followed Billy into the home to see if an adult was present. Reporter noted a strong "foul odor" inside the home with many more bags of trash inside the home (reporter estimated 7-8 bags outside the home and 10-12 inside the home). The reporter stated there were garbage and food items on the floor, including empty beer and pop cans, cereal, pizza boxes, cigarette butts, and dirty diapers (which were in the living room and kitchen area). The reporter noticed several cats in the home, but did not know how many.

As they walked in, Willy came from a back area in the home. Willy was wearing a diaper that was “sagging to his knees.” Willy wanted reporter to pick him up, reporter said Willy’s arms were extended and he was making “grunting noises” as if he wanted up. Reporter did not pick him up because Billy quickly picked him up and changed Willy’s diaper on the living room floor. Reporter asked Billy if he changed Willy’s diaper a lot and Billy “looked perplexed” and said “yeah.”

Shortly after (about 2-3 minutes) arriving at the home, Billy’s mother, Rachael, came home. Rachael was “surprised” to see reporter and asked “what are you doing here?” Reporter explained to Rachael that she was dropping Billy off. Rachael told reporter that “they must have just missed each other because she was only gone a few minutes.” Rachael told reporter she had to run a quick errand. Reporter noticed a plastic bag in Rachael’s hand, but didn’t know where it was from. Reporter left quickly after Rachael arrived because reporter was “uncomfortable in the situation.”

Screening



Screening maltreatment reports involves analyzing the data received during intake. Screening results in a disposition (decision) that the report is screened in (accepted) for Family Assessment or Investigation, or screened out.

Some agencies have screening teams that collaboratively analyze intake information. Other agencies assign specific people to screen intakes; sometimes the screeners are also assigned to intake duties. Consult with your supervisor regarding your agency’s intake and screening processes and participants.

From the Attachments tab, print the CW – CP Screening Flowchart for an in-depth look at the screening process.

Good Screening Practice Steps:

- Check records to ensure the report has not been previously received and assessed.
- Check agency records to determine history of services or prior reports.
- Identify family strengths and needs.
- Analyze pertinent information without inserting personal bias, values, or attitudes.
- Apply Minnesota law, rule and state screening guidelines to determine whether the report meets statutory criteria – or minimum threshold – for response.

- Make important decisions quickly. Decisions should in no way be reflective of your personal beliefs, emotions, or theories.

The following factors often influence screening decisions:

- Detailed reports.
- First-hand reports. These provide the most accurate, detailed description of the maltreatment concern. Second and third-hand reports may be more difficult to screen. (However, if the allegations meet statutory criteria the agency must respond.)
- Family's current or past history of child protective services.

It is important to understand that a family's current or past history can't be the deciding factor to screen a report in or out. Regardless of the family's history, the report must meet statutory criteria for response.

Consult with your supervisor and colleagues to identify other factors that may influence screening decisions.

Screening Timelines

Before we consider dispositions, we need to understand statutory timeline requirements. Minnesota §626.556, Subdivision 7, require all child maltreatment reports to be screened within 24 hours of receipt. Screening includes determining whether to accept or decline the report for a Family Assessment or Investigation – that is, to screen the report in or out.

In situations of imminent danger, consult with your supervisor to screen and assess the report immediately.

Consult with your supervisor regarding your agency's business day and after-hours intake screening policies and procedures. Questions to ask your supervisor include:

- How does our agency handle after-hours, weekend and holiday reports?
- If a secondary agency forwards reports to us, how do we receive the reports and when do we screen them?
- Does the agency have a written policy? If so, ask for a copy.

Disposition Criteria

The decision made regarding the report is referred to as the **disposition**. Whether the report is screened in for Family Assessment or Investigation, or screened out, depends entirely on whether the allegation meets criteria for a child protection response.

According to Minnesota Rule 9560.0216, at <https://www.revisor.mn.gov/rules/?id=9560.0216>, a report that meets the following three specific criteria must be screened in – or accepted for – a Family Assessment or Investigation.

1. The allegations in the report constitute child maltreatment as defined in Minnesota §626.556.

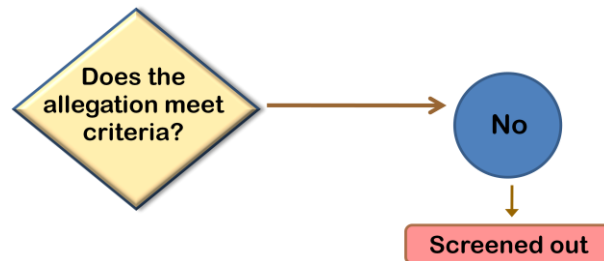
The *Minnesota Child Maltreatment Screening Guidelines* provide direction in determining whether to screen a report in and help interpret the statutory definitions of maltreatment. From the Attachments tab, print and review this document.

2. There must be sufficient information to locate the child or at least one member of the family unit.

For reports on children who were allegedly maltreated in one county but reside in another county, refer to M.R. 9560.0216 to identify which county should provide child protective services, including Assessment or Investigation.

3. The report contains information that has not previously been received and assessed. When these three criteria are met, the minimum threshold that requires an Assessment or Investigation is met.

Does the Allegation Meet Criteria?



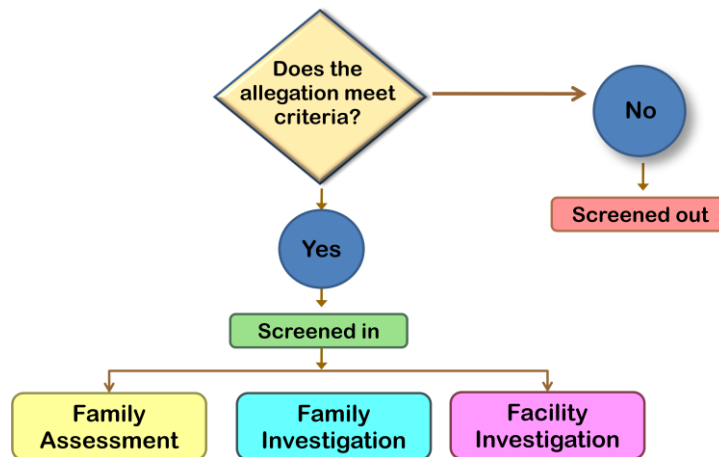
Ask, “Does the allegation meet criteria?” When the answer is No, the report is screened out.

Screened out reports should clearly identify why the disposition was chosen by citing statute, screening guidelines, agency policy, and/or other rationale. Consult with your supervisor to determine your agency’s procedures for documenting these dispositions.

Screened out reports are still relevant:

- For statistical purposes on the number of reports received by the agency
- If additional information meeting the minimum threshold for Assessment is received regarding the same child.

Some screened out intakes can be referred internally for other responses, such as a Child Welfare (CW) Assessment or Parent Support Outreach Program (PSOP) response. CW and PSOP responses are at the discretion of the agency and parent/caregiver participation is strictly voluntary. Consult with your supervisor to learn if your agency provides these responses.



When the answer to the question, “Does the allegation meet criteria?” is Yes, the report is screened in and assigned one of three child protection responses, or tracks:

- Family Assessment Response
- Family Investigation
- Facility Investigation.

Determining the appropriate track primarily depends on whether the child is safe, at risk of immediate and serious harm, or the report meets criteria for substantial child endangerment.

All reports received by the agency must be formally screened, even if a case is open for child protection case management. If the new report meets criteria to be screened in, a new Family Assessment or Family Investigation must be conducted. If the new report doesn’t meet criteria, the concerns are screened out and the report is referred to the assigned case worker and open SSIS workgroup.

Family Assessment Track

Recall from Module 4 that reports are assigned for Family Assessment Response when they do not involve allegations of substantial child endangerment. Family Assessment is the preferred response when conditions of safety permit. Face-to-face contact with the child and primary caregiver must occur within five calendar days of receiving the report.

Chapter 2 presents Family Assessment in detail.

Family Investigation Track

Recall from Module 4 that a Family Investigation track must be used when substantial child endangerment is alleged. This includes egregious harm, physical and sexual abuse, and reports of high risk neglect.

When substantial child endangerment is alleged, the worker is required to have a face-to-face contact with the child *immediately* – within 24 hours of accepting the report for Investigation. If substantial child endangerment is not alleged, but the report is accepted as a Family Investigation for discretionary reasons, face-to-face contact must occur within five calendar days of receiving the report.

Chapter 3 presents Family Investigation in detail.

Facility Investigation Track

To engage in a Facility Investigation, child maltreatment must be alleged to have occurred in a facility by a person responsible for the child's care. Jurisdiction varies. Some facilities are investigated by state agencies such as DHS or Department of Education; other facility investigations are handled by county or tribal agencies.

Facilities handled by county or tribal agencies include:

- Family child care
- Family foster care
- Legally unlicensed child care
- Juvenile correctional facilities (licensed under Minnesota §241.021) located in the county's jurisdiction
- Unlicensed personal care attendant providers or organizations (licensed under Minnesota §256B.0659).

It is important to know which agency has jurisdiction. When in doubt about the appropriate jurisdiction, take the information and record it, rather than instructing the caller to contact another agency. It often takes time and thought for a reporter to make this type of report, so dismissing a reporter may result in no report at all. Best practice is to determine which agency has jurisdiction, forward the report to that agency, and notify the reporter about next steps.

Notification Requirements

There are notification requirements regarding initial intakes and subsequent dispositions. In each agency, these responsibilities may be shared or assigned to specific individuals.

Minnesota Statutes mandate the exchange – or cross-reporting – of alleged child maltreatment between the social services agency and the responsible law enforcement agency. Each agency is required to immediately – within 24 hours – cross-report information orally when it is received, and then provide a written report. Talk with your supervisor to learn your agency's methods for notifying law enforcement in writing of screened in reports. DHS policy interprets this statute to mean that only reports accepted for assessment must be cross-reported to law enforcement. The agency may receive reports that do not meet maltreatment criteria, but may indicate criminal activity. These reports must also be cross-reported to law enforcement.

The agency is required to notify law enforcement when a report alleges neglect, physical abuse, or sexual abuse by an offender for whom the agency does *not* have any assessment or investigative responsibilities (that is, the alleged offender is not functioning within the family or does not have caretaking responsibilities). Law enforcement is solely responsible for investigating these cases. Law enforcement may request social services involvement – a cooperative investigation – for purposes of providing services.

Notification to Reporters

Other notification requirements also exist regarding disposition. Agencies are required to provide mandated reporters with initial notification of whether the intake has been accepted for Family

Assessment, Family Investigation or Facility Investigation, a referral has been made to a community organization, or the intake was screened out. The disposition notification can be a written or verbal summary; it must be provided to the reporter within 10 days of the report.

The agency is required to send notification to voluntary reporters when they request to receive a summary of the disposition.

If release of the intake's disposition would be detrimental to the best interests of the child, the notification is *not* required.

Talk with your supervisor to learn how your agency provides screening disposition notices to mandated and voluntary reporters.

Summary

From the Module 7 Attachments tab, print Module 7 Chapter 1 Screening Scenarios.

As a summary to this chapter, review the three scenarios, apply your accumulated knowledge to each scenario and make a screening disposition. You will discuss your screening decisions during supervisory consultation; take your scenarios with you so that you have the necessary information available.

Next Steps

File this transcript behind the Module 7 Transcript tab.

If you have not already done so, print the following documents and file them behind the Module 7 Resources tab:

- The CW – CP Intake Flowchart
- The CW – CP Screening Flowchart.

Print the Intake Questions Checklist and file it behind the Field Tools tab.

Print Minnesota Child Maltreatment Screening Guidelines and file behind the Policy Federal/State tab.

Print Module 7 Chapter 1 Screening Scenarios; after consultation, file it behind the Classroom Activities tab.

Consult with your supervisor regarding your agency's:

- Policies and procedures for handling emergencies during intake and screening
- Business day and after-hours intake screening procedures
- Intake and screening processes and participants
- Whether your agency provides CW and/or PSOP responses for screened out reports that meet program criteria
- Methods for notifying law enforcement of screened in maltreatment reports and reports the agency is not responsible for
- How your agency provides screening disposition notices to reporters.

And, consult with your supervisor about the three Screening Scenarios and your decisions.

When you are ready, begin Chapter 2.